DTS Technology Brief

A Practical Technology Application Overview

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GENERATING XML SITEMAPS FOR AGENCY WEB SITES

The State of Utah is currently engaged in a site mapping project with Google. Site maps enable Google and other search engines to completely crawl and understand the page context (not including data) of an agency's Web site.

A sitemap is simply an XML file that is produced by a sitemap generating application after it crawls an entire site, providing a list of every URL and the date that each page was last updated. Once placed within the root directory, search engines can access the file to improve their performance during a search.

In addition, many site map generators can automatically notify search engines when pages are added or updated, preventing unnecessary crawling and saving bandwidth. Web designers can submit their content in a uniform manner that is universally understood by any search engine which has adopted the protocol. For details on the site mapping protocol and required implementation code for Web sites, see http://www.sitemaps.org/protocol.html.

Establishing an XML Sitemap

There are two basic types of site map: the HTML version, which is designed with the user in mind (typically generated by Dreamweaver or a similar application, or, by hand); and an XML sitemap, consisting of XML tags generated by one of several sitemap generating applications and designed to assist search engine Web crawlers in locating the content of existing pages. This discussion focuses on applying XML sitemaps to existing sites.

There are several basic sitemap generating applications available, free of charge. Some of these applications have enhanced features, available for a small fee. For demonstration purposes, the Free Sitemap Generator will be used as an example. It is a straightforward, easy to use application.

If you are a Web designer with access to the host location or server of a Web site, follow these steps:

1. Access http://www.freesitemapgenerator.com/. The site opens.

2. Under the subtitle "How does it work?" locate and click the "create an account" link. The Create a New Account page opens.

3. Fill in the New Account form as appropriate, including the URL of the site to be mapped. Be sure to use the appropriate format and complete path. Also, you may want to review the options for automatic updating and Google notification.

4. When finished, click the Create Account button at the bottom of the page. A new page opens explaining that an activation e-mail has been sent to the e-mail address that you provided.

5. When you receive the e-mail, click on the link to activate your account. A Free Sitemap Generator.com Web page opens, notifying you that your account has been activated.

Security
The Free Sitemap Generator discussed here is rated safe by McAfee. Check the security features of any free generator before applying it to your site.

Figure 1
Control Panel

Additional Features
Many sitemap generators can be configured to update the XML sitemap automatically on regular schedule. However, this feature may have an associated fee.

Some generators produce a list of broken links. This is a handy feature that is free with some services.

Read carefully concerning the limitations of each sitemap generator. Some have a low free URL total, in the range of 500 pages, while others will map from 5,000 to 10,000 pages at no cost.

6. Click the Continue to Control Panel button. A Sitemap Jobs page opens containing instructions and a table displaying the URL of your Web site.

7. Click the Make Sitemap button associated with your Web site. A new page opens with instructions to place an empty file into the root directory of your site. This empty text file is used to confirm that you are the owner of the site.

8. Create the empty text file and upload it into the root directory of your site, as instructed on the page.

9. Click the Continue button at the bottom of the page. A new page opens indicating the status of your request. If your request has been verified the job is placed in a queue to begin processing. You may check on the progress of your job by selecting the Control Panel link. Your position within the queue is indicated. Depending on how many jobs are ahead of yours in the queue, and the size of your site, the process may take some time. There is no need to monitor the process. Once your site has been mapped you will receive an e-mail with the sitemap file attached.

10. Upload the sitemap file to the root directory of your Web site.

11. Let Google know that a sitemap has been created, by accessing: http://www.google.com/support/webmasters/bin/answer.py?answer=34575.

More Free Sitemap Generators

Although we reviewed the process for using Free Sitemap Generator, there are many other free generators available. The list below offers a few of the more prominent applications, but a Google search will bring up many more. It doesn't matter which generator is used, but it is important that State and agency Web sites produce sitemaps to enhance access by our citizens.

Add Me ROR Sitemap Generator (http://www.addme.com/ror-sitemap-generator.htm)

Free Sitemap Generator (http://www.freesitemapgenerator.com)

ROR Sitemap Generator (http://www.rorweb.com/rormap.htm)

VIGOS Gsitemap (http://www.vigos.com/products/gsitemap)

XML-Sitemaps (http://www.xml-sitemaps.com)